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ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to offer state and district policymakers a thoughtful set of questions to ask about school reform models and the organizations that develop them. The questions follow the criteria for schoolwide reform as spelled out in the federal legislation. Policymakers are encouraged to consider these questions as they work with developers of school reform programs to effectively implement CSRD, the Comprehensive School Reform Development Project. CSRD is a program that allocates funds to states through Title I and the Fund for the Improvement of Education resources. (AA)

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COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM

CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS

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EA 029 529

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COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM

CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS

In November 1997, Congress allocated $150 million for implementation of comprehensive school reform in schools across the country. The bipartisan legislation, sponsored by Representatives John Porter (R-IL) and David Obey (D-WI), reflects a growing belief that comprehensive school reform programs are an effective way to raise academic achievement for all students.

Traditionally, educators implemented individual programs targeting the different needs of their schools — a math program, a literacy campaign or a technology plan. What distinguishes this legislation, known as the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Project, is its clear message that a collection of such add-on programs does not necessarily add up to a coherent schoolwide vision that drives effective reform.

CSRD allocates funds to states through the Title I formula. Under this initiative, individual schools will receive, on a competitive basis, a grant of at least $50,000 to implement a comprehensive school reform model and pay for technical assistance to help implement the model. How these grants flow to schools, and which schools receive these grants, will be determined at the state and district levels. While the federal legislation identifies criteria for what constitutes a comprehensive school reform model, individual states also have a great deal of leeway in determining which models receive funding.

The CSRD is a new source of dollars to help answer a question many state policymakers already are asking: how do we help schools that are failing? And while these funds are specifically targeted for this purpose, the exciting news is that the entire Title I program — literally billions of dollars — could be used for the same thing. This

funding represents the tip of the iceberg in terms of federal dollars and opportunities to use them for state school improvement efforts.

This booklet, one of a three-part series, is designed to offer state and district policymakers a thoughtful set of questions to ask about school reform models and the organizations that develop them. The questions follow the criteria for schoolwide reform as spelled out in the federal legislation. Policymakers are encouraged to consider these questions as they work with developers of school reform programs to effectively implement CSRD.

Criterion

Employ innovative strategies and proven methods for student learning, teaching and school management that are based on reliable research and effective practices and have been replicated successfully in schools with diverse characteristics.

Questions

- ☑ On what "reliable research" was the model conceived?
- ☑ What evidence is there to illustrate the program's effectiveness in improving student achievement? Is the evidence based on schools where the model has been fully implemented over several years?
- ☑ How successful has the school reform developer been in executing the model in schools of varying needs and demographics? Does the provider have a demonstrated track record of reaching out to schools with diverse characteristics?
- ☑ Are there clusters of schools, such as a geographical or "virtual" district, that can use the same model and provide one another support? What other evidence is there of effective practices?
- ☑ What stands out about the developer in terms of proven innovative strategies in the areas of student learning, teaching and school management?

Criterion

Have a comprehensive design for effective school functioning including instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement and school management. The design should align curriculum, technology and professional development into a schoolwide reform plan designed to enable all students to meet challenging state content and performance standards. It also should address needs identified through a school needs assessment.

Questions

- ☑ Does the program encompass the whole school and not just particular grade levels, subjects, students or teachers?
- ☑ Does the model clearly and centrally focus on improved teaching and learning?
- ☑ Is the model truly comprehensive in scope? Does it demonstrate a clear internal logic that ties everything (e.g., curriculum, standards, assessments, teaching and professional development) to improved student achievement?
- ☑ How will the developer help each school incorporate the program to meet the school's own vision? Are the strategies to accomplish this well thought out?
- ☑ What evidence shows that eligible districts and schools are willing and able to reallocate resources toward comprehensive school reform to guarantee long-term success?
- ☑ How has the developer mapped out strategies to ensure all students meet or exceed state standards?
- ☑ Does the developer demonstrate how it will respond to student needs as identified by the school and other assessments?
- ☑ Does the developer explain in detail what its relationship will be to the school and how long its site-based assistance will be necessary? For example, is the same investment level necessary to continue the relationship after three years?

- ☑ What evidence indicates the developer has the capacity (internal and external staff) to deliver what it promises?
- ☑ Does the developer outline what key "readiness factors" it must see from a school before the model is implemented? Has the school or district conducted a thoughtful and comprehensive study of whether it can effectively implement the model at this time?

CRITERION **Provide high-quality and continuous teacher and staff professional development and training.**

QUESTIONS

- ☑ How will the developer measure whether its professional development plan results in improved teaching and learning?
- ☑ Is the developer able to tailor a professional development plan that meets each school's individual strengths and weaknesses?
- ☑ Is the school or district willing to reallocate funding as necessary for start-up and continuing professional development?
- ☑ Do the schools have sufficient control over their budgets to ensure they are able to carry out professional development in the way they see fit?
- ☑ Does the model's professional development plan also include leadership training for principals?
- ☑ Does the model include a plan for ongoing professional development?

CRITERION **Have measurable goals for student performance and benchmarks for meeting those goals.**

QUESTIONS

- ☑ What indicators does the model embrace to benchmark student and school performance (e.g., standardized tests, hands-on assessment, dropout rates, student/parent satisfaction)?

- ☑ Does the program provide for a uniform methodology or instruments to pre-test and post-test student achievement?
- ☑ Does the model have a demonstrated track record of improving student test scores?
- ☑ In what specific ways do the program's standards and assessments mesh with state or district standards and assessments? How will potential mismatches be addressed?
- ☑ Does the model include strategies to address the needs of students who fall behind?
- ☑ Is there evidence that demonstrates those strategies are effective in closing the gap between high-performing and low-achieving students?
- ☑ Does the model's assessment and evaluation plan provide for frequent monitoring of student performance, particularly in schools where high student mobility is an issue?

CRITERION

Ensure support of school faculty, administrators and staff.

QUESTIONS

- ☑ Does the developer require demonstration of widespread support among the school's faculty, administrators and staff for the proposed reform?
- ☑ If school faculty, administrators and staff do not support the plan, does the model incorporate a strategy to address key concerns (responsiveness/flexibility)?
- ☑ How does the developer assess whether a school is ready to enter into an effective, long-term partnership?
- ☑ Does the model have the support of school faculty, administrators and staff in other districts in which it is working or has worked?

CRITERION **Provide for the involvement of parents and the local community in planning and implementing school improvement activities.**

QUESTIONS

- ☑ Does the developer require evidence of parent and community support before entering an agreement with a school?
- ☑ Does the developer concretely and thoroughly explain what role parents and community members will play in implementing the design? Is the developer flexible and responsive to new suggestions?
- ☑ Will the developer make clear, easy-to-understand information widely available to the community?
- ☑ Does the model have a proven track record of involving parents and community members in a meaningful way?
- ☑ How has the developer ensured and demonstrated to parents and community members that its model will meet the needs of their children?

CRITERION **Use high-quality external technical support and assistance from a comprehensive school reform entity (which may be a university) with experience or expertise in schoolwide reform and improvement.**

QUESTIONS

- ☑ Has the developer provided thorough information about what results its model is designed to accomplish, and what it is not designed to do?
- ☑ Does the developer have a timeline detailing what results the school can expect to see from one year to the next (for example, a decline in student discipline in the first year; significant improvements in reading and math scores by the fifth year)?
- ☑ What specific commitments will the developer make to support design implementation?

- ☑ Does the developer include clear information on start-up and maintenance costs of the model?
- ☑ What evidence is there that the model has a track record for improving student achievement, supporting administrative leadership, enhancing the school climate, facilitating collegiality among staff, and building partnerships between the school and the community?

CRITERION **Include a plan for evaluating the implementation of school reforms and the student results achieved.**

QUESTIONS

- ☑ What indicators does the developer use to measure the success of the design's implementation in a school?
- ☑ What evidence is there that the model's developers are flexible and responsive, and have adjusted their practices in light of previous evaluations?
- ☑ How does the model align its evaluation process with those of the district and state?

CRITERION **Identify how other resources (federal/state/local/private) available to the school will be used to coordinate services to support and sustain the school reform effort.**

QUESTIONS

- ☑ Will the developer help a school identify a plan to sustain comprehensive school reform once the federal funding runs out?
- ☑ How does the developer help schools and districts leverage existing resources such as funding, staff and in-kind contributions?

Note: For more information about choosing comprehensive school reform models and allocating federal funds under the CSRD, please see the other two publications in this series: **Identifying Effective Models** *and* **Allocating Federal Funds.** *Both are available from the Education Commission of the States; 303-299-3692. Or download the text from our Web site: http://www.ecs.org.*

This document is the product of the collaboration and insights of many people, including the staff of New American Schools, the developers of the 17 comprehensive school reform models mentioned in the Comprehensive School Reform Initiative, and a host of educators and policymakers who gathered for the ECS Policies and Practices Forum in November 1997.

Copies of this three-part series are available for $7.50 from the ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, Colorado 80202-3427, 303-299-3692. Ask for No. AN-98-2. ECS accepts prepaid orders, MasterCard, American Express and Visa. All sales are final.

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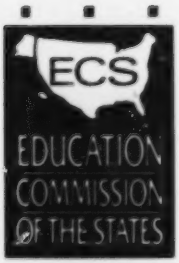

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